

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04  
NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01  
PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /069 W  
-----121238Z 016957 /17

R 121150Z JAN 77  
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6526  
INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI  
AMCONSUL BOMBAY  
AMCONSUL MADRAS  
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA  
CINCPAC  
COMIPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD: COMIPAC FOR IC AND 1225

E.O. 11652:N/A  
TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CE  
SUBJECT: LABOR SITUATION: STRIKES PERSIST

REF: (A) COLOMBO 0121; (B) COLOMBO 0099

1. SUMMARY. MORE WORKERS LEFT THEIR JOBS JANUARY 12 BUT FEWER THAN HAD BEEN ANTICIPATED. BUS SERVICE IS SOMEWHAT IMPROVED. CENSORSHIP CONTINUES STRICT ON STRIKE NEWS. NEW GOVERNMENT STATEMENT APPEALED FOR RETURN TO WORK. END SUMMARY.

2. AS THREATENED, THE LARGE (APPROXIMATELY 80,000-MEMBER) CEYLON FEDERATION OF LABOR (CFL) STRUCK WORK TODAY AT NUMEROUS PRIVATE SECTOR COMPANIES AND GOVERNMENT CORPORATIONS. HOWEVER, THE NUMBER OF

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WORKERS RESPONDING WAS NOT WHAT THE CFL HAD HOPED. ITS LARGE TEA PLANTATION UNION HAS NOT COME OUT, BUT IS HAVING STRIKE DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHER PLANTATION UNIONS. IN THE MANUFACTURING SECTOR, LEVER BROTHERS EMPLOYEES DEFIED THEIR CFL LEADERSHIP, ARGUING THAT THEIR POCKETBOOKS COULD NOT STAND ANOTHER LENGTHY PERIOD WITHOUT PAYCHECKS (THEY CAME BACK IN SEPTEMBER FROM AN 86-DAY STRIKE). OTHER CFL AFFILIATES STRUCK AT THE BATA SHOE COMPANY AND

CEYLON TOBACCO COMPANY. AMONG GOVERNMENT CORPORATIONS, MOST PETROLEUM CORPORATION WORKERS APPEAR TO BE RESISTING THE STRIKE CALL. (HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE NEED TO SUPPLY GAS BY TANK TRUCK RATHER THAN TRAIN TO THE PROVINCES, GAS DISTRIBUTION HAS BEEN SEVERELY CUT IN COLOMBO, INCLUDING TO THE EMBASSY.) SOME GOVERNMENT TEXTILE FACTORIES, ALWAYS CENTERS FOR ANTI-GOVERNMENT AGITATION, HAVE BEEN STRUCK FAIRLY SUCCESSFULLY.

3. IN A CONVERSATION WITH LABOFF, CFL GENERAL SECRETARY BATTY WEERAKOON REFUSED TO EXPRESS DISCOURAGEMENT AND SAID THAT HE EXPECTED MORE OF HIS WORKERS TO ANSWER THE STRIKE CALL TOMORROW AND ON SUCCEEDING DAYS. IT IS CLEAR THOUGH THAT THE IMMEDIATE EFFECT OF THE CFL ACTION IS LESS THAN THE GOVERNMENT HAD FEARED.

4. RAIL SERVICE REMAINS SPORADIC AND MINIMAL BUT IT IS SERVING TO GET LIMITED AMOUNTS OF FUEL TO CERTAIN OUTSTATIONS. PARTICULARLY KANDY WHERE THE SITUATION HAS REPORTEDLY EASED IN THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS. ONE PASSENGER TRAIN RAN TODAY ON TRACKS SOUTH OF COLOMBO. BUS SERVICE IS INCREASED IN COLOMBO OVER RECENT DAYS, ALTHOUGH NOT AS "NORMAL" AS GOVERNMENT PAPERS PROCLAIM. THE BUS STRIKE IS MOST EFFECTIVE IN THE SOUTH, WERE THE TROTSKYITE LAMKA SAMA JAMAJA PARTY (LSSP) AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY (CP) HAVE ALWAYS BEEN STRONG. SOME SOURCES SAY BUS SERVICE IS CONSIDERABLY REDUCED IN THE NORTH CENTRAL PROVINCE BUT WE HAVE NO RELIABLE INFORMATION FROM THERE. WITH SOME COLOMB MUNICIPAL WORKERS ON STRIKE, WATER SUPPLIES ARE BEING MAINTAINED BY NAVY PERSONNEL, AFTER A SHORT PERIOD OF CUTS.

5. PRESS CENSORSHIP CONTINUES TO AFFECT MAINLY THE LSSP AND CP LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DAILIES WHICH PUBLISHED JANUARY 12 WITH MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF THEIR TEXT CUT BY THE COMPETENT AUTHORITY. THE CP PAPER TRIED TO INSERT STRIKE COMMENTARY IN AN OTHERWISE-INNOCUOUS ARTICLE ON THE METRIC SYSTEM BUT IT WAS CAUGHT BY A SHARP-EYED CENSOR.

6. THE GOVERNMENT RADIO BROADCAST A LONG ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE MORNING OF JANUARY 12, WHICH WAS RELATIVELY CONCILIATORY TOWARD THE WORKERS, IF NOT THE UNIONS AND THEIR POLITICAL PATRONS. THE ANNOUNCEMENT WARNED THE STRIKERS NOT TO BE MISLED BY PROPAGANDA AND LISTED THE GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE RAIL WORKERS' DEMANDS, SAYING IT WAS NOT STANDING ON PRESTIGE AND REFUSING TO NEGOTIATE. HOWEVER, "A GOVERNMENT ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE SO LONG AS IT CONSTITUTIONALLY AND LEGALLY HOLDS OFFICE, CANNOT SURRENDER ITS RESPONSIBILITY TO MAINTAIN THE SUPPLIES ESSENTIAL TO THE COMMUNITY, NOTWITHSTANDING THE POLITICAL OPINIONS OF THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY WOULD PREFER A DIFFERENT GOVERNMENT." SAYING THAT THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY'S AIM WAS TO FORCE EARLY ELECTIONS AND THAT THE LSSP WAS TRYING TO PROVE THAT AN ELECTED GOVERNMENT COULD NOT RULE WITHOUT ITS

PARTICIPATION OR CONSENT, THE ANNOUNCEMENT ALSO REFERRED INDIRECTLY TO THE RULING SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY'S COALITION PARTNER, THE COMMUNIST PARTY, AND ITS SUPPORT FOR THE STRIKE. WITHOUT MENTIONING THE CP BY NAME, THE ANNOUNCEMENT ARGUED THAT THE PARTY WAS SUPPORTING THE SOLIDARITY OF THE WORKING CLASS WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING THAT THE WORKING CLASS WAS BEING USED FOR ULTERIOR POLITICAL MOTIVES. THE STATEMENT INCLUDED A WARNING THAT, ALTHOUGH THE GOVERNMENT HAD NOT YET HIRED NEW EMPLOYEES TO REPLACE STRIKEERS, IT WOULD DO SO WITHIN A DAY OR TWO.

7. COMMENT: UNLESS THERE ARE FURTHER COMPLICATIONS, MOST MAJOR UNIONS THAT ARE LIKELY TO COME OUT HAVE NOW DONE SO. THUS THE STRIKE MAY HAVE PEAKED BUT IT IS FAR FROM OVER. END COMMENT.  
REED

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** LABOR STRIKES  
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**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 22 May 2009  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
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**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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